


AMERICAN GUIDE SERIES

HOOSIER TALL STORIES


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Compiled and Written by the
Federal Writers' Project in Indiana
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION

1937

until 1894 that a definite place was established where a man might go and be sure of an audience any time of day. A large heavy bridge plank was wedged between two locust trees near the entrance to one of the crossroad stores. The plank was thick and long, and with a brace in the center gave enough room for a number of men and boys who kept the bench full throughout the day and far into the night. As fast as one would leave some other would take his place.

Here children came repeatedly with the announcement "Pa, Ma wants you!" Still the story-telling continued. Sometimes it took two or three summonses before Pa would leave the bench.

From Fountain County comes the report that whenever the mendacious heroes of small town life foregather, this bench exists, and whenever the faithful meet on store platform or barber shop or garage, the tall stories are told. No one believes them unless it is the narrator, who by repetition has come to believe his own myths. They cannot come in the category of lies, for a lie is deliberate and is usually without value as entertainment, but untruths they undoubtedly are. It requires a real effort of the imagination to produce some of the fearful and wonderful tales "swapped" on these occasions.

It is from this source that Hoosier examples of the Tall Story come.

A Whopper

Preparing for the siege at Vicksburg, General Grant's men were plowing the channel of a mortar boat canal (not motor boat) some 8 feet deep and 15 feet wide to be used as a waterway to float the mortar into position.

Such a task was Herculean and demanded the use of 24 yoke of oxen, a total of 48 animals. Handling the plow was a mean struggle for the strongest and required the efforts of a number of men.

An onlooker remarked that if he couldn't do a better job by himself than they were doing, he wouldn't touch the plow handles. General Grant, hearing the remark, and thinking the fellow a braggart, told the bystander to take over the job and plow the canal.

Before the astonished eyes of the soldiers, as the story goes, this boastful fellow commanded the oxen to move on, and, grasping the plow handles, went on to complete the canal. Only one obstacle confronted his efforts and that was a large sycamore stump which completely blocked the path of the waterway. But on coming to the stump the fellow hastened the oxen to more speed, and, firmly grasping the plow handles, cleft it apart and passed through.

But alas! the stump closed again, catching the coattails of the braggart. The water in the canal was advancing rapidly, with the mortar boats following close behind. With great speed the fellow turned the ox-team around, snipping short his coattails, and plowed out the stump before the bow of the foremost boat could touch him.

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"Them Plaguey Indians"

"An old woman who lived near the frontier during our disturbance with Great Britain had possessed a marvelous propensity for learning the news, and frequently used to make inquiries of the soldiers. On one occasion she called to a passing soldier whom she had frequently saluted before: 'What's the news?'

"'Why,' said he, 'the Indians have fixed a crow-bar under Lake Erie, and are going to turn it over and drown the world.' 'Oh massy! massy! what shall I do?' she cried, and ran away to tell the neighbors of the danger and inquire of her minister how such a calamity might be averted. 'Why,' says he, 'you need not be alarmed, we have our Maker's promise that He will not again destroy the world by water.'

"'I know that,' returned the old lady hastily, 'but He's nothing to do with it; it's ~~them~~ plaguey Indians.'

The Fox and the Bullet

In the grist of tall tales turned out at one session of the Liar's Bench is the story of the fox and the bullet.

"Ye've heard of Swain's hill over yonder?" began the first comer.

"I wouldn't wonder!" came a voice from the end seat.

"Well it's a small moundlike hill where a fox lived that used to worry the settlers right smart. So one morning on rising exceptional early a farmer saw the fox capering around, grabbed his gun, and ran out to the hill - I said it were a mound-shaped hill. So first he wrapped his gun around a tree - getting the circle of the hill - and then he fired at the fox as it disappeared around the curve. He clumb to the top of a tree at this point to look things over. Sure enough there was old Mr. Fox goin' at top speed around the hill with one ear cocked backwards listening for the whiz of the bullet, which was maybe a hundred foot behind. Around they went, and when that fox got back to the same point, the bullet was only 75 foot behind. The next time it was 25 foot, and on the fourth round the bullet got him. Yep, it got that fox!"

"Ye don't say!" was the amazed response from the sitter whose head had been moving back and forth as he tried to figure how it would look for a fox to race a bullet round Swain's hill.

Not So Tall

All of the old stories are not of the large or tall variety. To prove it we include several yarns credited to real characters whom we may trust.

* * * * *

A Dirty Trick

One day Tom Mount, who belonged to the Old Ox Church, was sprucing up to go to the annual foot-washing service. He had carefully washed his feet. Why he went to all the trouble to wash them when

they would get washed anyway is a question, but anyway he did. But his wife, who thought all this foot-washing was "dern foolishness," didn't do a thing but put black soot in his nice clean socks. And Tom innocently put them on and sallied forth to the "foot-washing."

When in the solemn part of the ceremony Tom pulled off his sock to let a brother wash his foot -- lo, and behold! his black foot shone forth in all the glory of the morning!

If some of the elders didn't snicker, they must have had a real serious grip on their religion! History does not record just what Tom said to his wife when he returned home!

"Blue Jeans" Williams, the Commoner

While "Blue Jeans" Williams was campaigning about the State during his race for Congress (1874) he capitalized on his "homespun" appearance, and the fact that he was one of the common people. The nickname "Blue Jeans," with which he had been derisively dubbed while running for Governor, had literally swept him on to victory, as he hoped his common habits and customs might do again.

"Why folks," he exclaimed while making a political speech in Southern Indiana, "I'm jest an ordinary dirt farmer. I jest grewed up between two corn rows."

"Some punkin!" shouted one of his adversaries in the crowd.

Hail, Hail!

"I mind the time," an oldtimer started with his customary signal for a tall tale, "when it hailed so hard in July near Camden that it killed 500 chickens for one farmer."

"You don't say," commented the most interested listener.

"Yep, it did. And that farmer and his wife dressed the chickens, put them in barrels, scooped the hailstones over the chickens and they had chicken the rest of the summer."

"Humph," the interested listener began again. "Minds me of the time it hailed out home and one hailstone was so large that it hit the top of my silo, bounced around some, and then fell off and killed a calf below."

Oldtimer looked sternly at his companion. Then he spoke:

"Only, ye see, I wasn't lyin' about the chickens."

He Roofed the Fog

Years ago there lived in Waukarusa a carpenter renowned for the size of the stories he told.

One time during damp and foggy weather this carpenter was shingling a house. It was so foggy that he could hardly see to do his work, but he continued nevertheless working hard, and went home finally in the fog.

During the night the fog cleared and he went back to the job in the morning.

"Imagine my surprise," he related afterwards, "when I arrived at my place of work, to find that I had finished the yon side of the roof and shingled two feet beyond the eaves in the fog."

June to December

Bill Stafford, who lives alone over west of Centerton in the hills near Gold Creek is known in Morgan County as the oddest citizen. He was never known to speak the truth. Bill says he could make \$10.00 a day panning gold out of "Gold Creek" if he could take time off from his cordwood cutting to work at it. But he just had to cut cordwood.

Several years ago it was Bill's custom to go to Martinsville, get a big crowd around him and rear out his yarns.

"I ran across this here bear I was tellin' you about--a fierce one, mind you--while I was picking raspberries in June," one of his stories begins. "Well, I was unarmed, so I turn to run for dear life. But the bear came ripping along, right on my trail. On and on we run up hill and down dale, 'til finally we came to White River and I crossed over on the ice."

"But, Bill, how could you have crossed the river the ice in June?" asked one of his listeners.

"Why you see," drawled Bill, "we did a heap of rapin', and by this time it was the middle of December."

A Lie Without Thinking

John Cox was for years known as the outstanding liar of Harrison County. His neighbors liked to listen to his yarns just for the fun.

Early one morning Tom Jones looked up the road and saw John rushing his horses down the lane. Tom called to his wife, "Jane, here comes John Cox. Wonder which way his mind will run this morning?"

By this time Cox's horses were galloping by the house. "John, what's your hurry?" Tom shouted. "Jane and I were just pining to hear one of your lies this morning. Stop and tell us one without even thinking."

"Sorry, Tom, but I can't today," John shouted back. "I am in a mighty big hurry. Nick Boley's wife died last night and I'm on my way to Corydon to buy the coffin." And Cox was gone out of sight.

The Joneses were a good deal excited because Mr. and Mrs. Boley were their nearest neighbors. Mrs. Boley had not even been complaining. Now she was dead.

They did their chores in a hurry, dressed in their Sunday best, hitched the horse to the buggy and were driving to the Boleys, as the old saying goes, before "the wag of a dead sheep's tail." As they drove into sight of the house, Tom burst out all of a sudden, "Who's that sitting on the porch knitting?"

"That's Sarah Boley as sure as I'm alive," said Jane.

"Well, I suppose we got what we asked for," Tom Jones said, trying to drive by as if he and Jane were just bound for town.

A Historic Fish Story

Moody Dustin, a potter who went south every fall to sell his wares, is best remembered by the people of Jeffersonville as one of the outstanding Falls pilots of the time when some persons were licensed to pilot boats around the Falls, before the canal was built there between Louisville and Jeffersonville.

One of the most remarkable fish stories ever heard of was told on Moody Dustin, by Capt. W. B. Carter, another pilot. Dustin had sold all his goods and had considerable money. The boys on his boat had been fishing and had caught several small fish, which they strung on a line and tied to the stern of the boat. During the night the craft began to rock. All on board were more or less filled with fear of a visit from a highwayman. It was not long before everybody was awake and whispering that pirates were about ready to do some scuttling. All hands arose, buckled on weapons and sallied forth. The boat continued to rock. No one was in sight. A thoughtful man started to lift up the string of fish but it was so heavy he called for assistance. A big catfish was drawn up. It had swallowed the string of fish, but the last one had stuck in the throat of the big fish, and its efforts to free itself had rocked the boat causing the commotion and alarm of those on board.

A "Sockdolager"

Sam (the name is fictitious, as the biggest liar is always well known in his community), a hunter famous in the vicinity of Vincennes both for his "tall stories" and his ability to bag game,

was once overtaken and accosted by the game warden.

"What luck?" began the game warden's inquiry.

"Oh, plenty!" said Sam; and he related his day's experiences and elaborated upon them: "Why, I bagged 17 squirrels (squirrels were out of season at the time) and 23 rabbits and killed 35 birds today."

"I see you've been fishing too," urged the game warden. "Did you catch many?"

"Oh, not with a line," bragged Sam, "but I have six nets out and do pretty well with them."

"Say, do you know who I am?" asked the game warden, suddenly, thinking he had the goods on Sam.

"No," truthfully replied our hero.

"Well, I'm the game warden," he replied.

But Sam undaunted asked "Do you know who I am?"

"No" snapped the game warden.

"Well," drawled Sam, "I am the biggest damliar in the county."

Tom, the Catfish

The story is told around Marion that when old Obidildock Manring of Grant County was young he caught a catfish in the Mississinewa river. It was too small to fry so he put it in a horse trough. Every day he stopped to feed the fish and before long it was quite a pet and so tame it would swim to the edge to be fed. One day, Tom, that's what "Obe" called his fish - jumped out of the horse trough and flopped along beside his master. After that Tom followed along all summer as Obidildock did his farm chores and was good company.

When school started, Tom followed Obidildock to school, for all the world like Mary's little lamb, but one day as they were crossing a foot

log over a creek, Tom slipped off and fell in.

"Yep," the narrator usually concludes, "it were too bad about that catfish. Might o' been livin' today if he hadn't got drowneded thataway!"

Old Squirrelly

"Minds me of Old Squirrelly, an Indian chief." The silence which means consent fell on the listening liars. So the narrator continued.

"Well - a mile west of the bridge crossing Pipe Creek northwest of Bunker Hill was an Indian Village. Squirrel Village it were called, for the Old Pottawatomie Indian chief - Old Squirrelly. Now this here Old Squirrelly were a capital hunter and near allus brought home his game. 'Ceptin' one day. This here day he had hunted, 'thout even finding any game till he was on his way home, when he saw a flock of 17 geese sitting in a row on a limb of a tree overhanging Pipe Creek. 'Thout a sound he snuck along a ravine opening out onto the crick until he got his range - and then he drew back his bow and let an arrow go! The arrow hit the limb the geese was sittin' on - splittin' it wide open and clean through the tree into the bargain. Then - the opening in the limb closed and every goose was caught just as it was sittin' on the limb. Yessir, it shore was!"

And so convincing was the tale, that not a voice was raised to question it.

"Re-markable - re-markable, I say!" came a voice from the group, putting the stamp of truth on the story.

Mighty Good Policy

W. C. Smith tells of a farmer south of Bloomington who wished to hire a hand. A young fellow came and applied for the job. "Well, I'll tell you," said the farmer, "I want a man who never gets hungry and never gets tired." "I'm the one you want," answered the young man. And so he was hired.

About the middle of the forenoon, the farmer saw the young hand stop work and go to the house. When the farmer went to the house to investigate, there sat the hand eating.

"I thought you never got hungry nor tired," said the irate farmer.

"Why, I don't. I eat before I get hungry and rest before I get tired," calmly replied the new hand.

The farmer kept him four years.

Lining a Hymn

In the old days when hymn books were scarce the preacher would read two lines of a hymn and the chorister would lead in the singing, the singers of the congregation falling in, one after the other, until by the time the end of the two lines were reached, most of them would be singing. It was this custom that gave rise to an incident that has been credited to many a congregation.

One night the preacher arose and said, "I cannot see to read the hymn. I left my specs behind." The chorister, quick to act, put the words to a long metered tune and the congregation trailed in. As the last note sounded, the preacher was quite irritated and said, "I did not mean that for a hymn, I only said my eyes were dim." But to no

avail; the words sounded good to the singers and they went right ahead singing the second couplet:

"I did not mean that for a hymn,

I only said my eyes were dim."

Hair Raising

In the settlement of Penn Township, St. Joseph County, the settlers had a lot of trouble with panthers and other animals that in the early days just about had the run of the place. One night, according to his story, a settler was in the woods at sugartime. He had plenty of sap on hand and was anxious to get it boiled down to syrup to make room for more. Sitting by the fire, with the sap boiling in his big kettle, he dozed off a little until all at once he was wakened by a heavy splash in his kettle of syrup. Whatever made the splash jumped from the kettle as fast as it had got in, and made for the woods screaming. The settler, frightened about stiff by the rumpus, made tracks for home.

Next morning the syrup in the kettle was covered with thick scum, and when the settler skimmed it off he found that most of it was hair. The day after that a hunter came into camp with a queer carcass in tow. It looked like a panther, except that it was bald all over. The settler and the hunter got together and agreed that the panther must have been scalded in the syrup. It had misjudged its spring when it leaped for the settler and had come down in the boiling mass, and then had run out to die in the woods. This was the last time a panther was seen in those parts, and it was also the last time that the settler ever kept a fire going under a sugar kettle all night.

Hot Marksmanship

Here is a kind of story which gives an idea of what crack shots the old settlers were in the days when folks depended a deal on their rifles and naturally took pains to practice whenever they could:

It seems two oldtimers had some trouble with each other that couldn't get settled no matter what, so to make it quick and no fooling they figured the best way was to get into the woods by themselves and have it out with their guns. So they went out a ways and turned back to back and stepped off twenty paces apiece. It was the rule in such cases to aim at the other man's left eye - the "sight eye" - which naturally was the one left in open when he was sighting a rifle, as you can try for yourself.

Well, these two oldtimers counted "three" together and fired, but blamed if either got so much as creased. They felt sort of ashamed at first, of course, but after they got to remembering how they hated each other and how there was no one looking on anyhow they went to loading up again, holding their place.

Well, they fired again, but no luck. There wasn't even the ruffle of a hair to show for the powder and lead they'd used up trying to stir up the material for an obituary. But they were obstinate and determined, so they shot and shot until a dozen charges had been used up apiece. By that time they got worrying what might happen if they run short of powder and ball for the next rumpus with the Indians, so they figured it would be best to call the show off.

Naturally this kind of weighed on them -- calling the thing off on such account -- but anyhow and someway they walked back midway and shook hands.

still wondering what in Tophet had come over their shooting. All at once one of them felt something hot under his boot and jumped. They both looked down. And darned if there wasn't a lump of hot lead!

Those two old buzzards had shot so straight at each other's left eye that every pair of bullets had met midbetween, and they had loaded and fired so fast that the next pair had met and melted in to the ones next before, so that in the end there was just one lump of lead that hadn't time to cool when they called off the show!

The Largest Barn

A man who attended barn raisings was prone to stretch the truth. His brother reminded him one morning when they started to a job not to tell such stories that no one could believe. "All right, when you think I am making the story too big just step on my toes."

They were all telling of the biggest building and this man said, "The largest barn I ever raised was 300 feet long and three (his brother stepped on his toes) feet wide." The story brought a laugh.

The Last of the Wild Turkeys

When wild turkeys were plentiful in the early days in St. Joseph County, a hunter who had never killed one in his life, to anyone's knowledge, told this story:

"I'd been squirrel-shooting late one afternoon just a little before dark, and when dusk came on I hadn't bagged a thing. I didn't like staying

in the woods any longer and yet I hated to go back home with nothing to show but my gun and a tired look. Well, moseying along feeling that way, I got to the edge of the woods and stopped to kind of rest myself and figure things out against the soft side of a rail fence. And as I was about to give it up and ramble on, what do you think I saw? Nothing less than as much as a dozen turkeys, roosting on a limb, all in a row, snug as you please!

"I had to think quick. The only guns we had those days were muzzleloaders. So I drew the load I had and wrapped the ramrod with wadding and chucked it back tight in the barrel. Then all I had to do was keep quiet until I found the right spot to shoot from. Pretty sudden I found my spot, took a good careful sight, and -- bang! Darned if I didn't split the whole dozen turkeys right through!

"I carried the lot home on the rod, but when I was sliding them off I noticed the loose ones were coming-to, so I had to wring a few necks.

"We had turkey for days after that, with some to spare for the neighbors. But I guess I must have wiped out all the wild turkeys there were left, for I've never heard of any being seen around here since."

Champion Chopper

One morning the champion chopper of the Eighth District, feeling "mighty fitten," took three axes and went down to the Wabash to fell a three-foot tree before breakfast so as to work up an appetite. He swung so hard and fast that his axe got so hot he had to put it in the river to cool. The water hissed and bubbled where he put it in, naturally

enough, and the chopper let the axe set and went back for a go with the next one. Pretty soon that axe heated up too, so he gave it the same dose he did the first. And he kept on that way, spelling axes, till the trunk was cut through and the tree fell kerplunk with the upmost branches in the river -- not that it bothered the boats any: the ones they used in that part of the river could float on fog anyhow.

Someone that don't know chopping might think an axe would get spoiled that way but of course anybody that has to do with such things knows that dousing axes in the water that way when they're hot brings back the temper, and they will sharpen up just as well as before. -

Well, folks thereabouts thought things like this were nothing to talk about, and of course, they wouldn't be, maybe, only on this morning it seems a neighbor of the champion chopper had started his hog-butchering, and he lived just around the bend below, so he used the water that was heated by the axes to scald his fresh-killed hogs.

Big Bedbugs

One of the Butler Boys of the Carbondale neighborhood told this story of Lem Martin of Independence, now deceased, who once made a visit to Arkansas:

It was Lem's first visit to the Bear State, and naturally, being a Hoosier and up on his hindlegs about it, he was forever bragging about the place, and naturally that meant running down the other parts of the Union. According to Lem, the crops were heavier, the men braver, the women prettier, and -- well, to come right down to it, Indiana was

so far away and above the rest of the country there was no use discussing the business. Regardless what the Arkansawyers showed Lem, he would have it that Indiana had something to put it in the shade.

Finally the natives got mighty tired of Lem's bragging around and set out to take him down a peg -- which is a way of saying that comes of the way people used to have of putting pegs in the side of drinking horns to score your gulp. So the landlord of the place Lem was putting up at had some of the boys catch a lot of the snappingest turtles they could coax onto and bring them to him, and tucked the catch away in Lem's bed. Then he sat down all peaceful to wait for the returns.

He didn't wait long. Pretty sudden after Lem turned in an awful howl comes down the stairs, fit to raise the roof, and almost as sudden down comes Lem, dragging one of the daddies of the lot that just couldn't let loose of his Indiana underwear, of which Lem was more than considerably proud.

The landlord let on to say nothing while Lem told him about the turtles in his bed. Lem was too excited to remember the one that was hanging onto his heel. But when Lem got him aloft and showed him the bed and floor crawling with turtles--

"Why," said the landlord, "those, Mr. Martin, are only Arkansas bedbugs."

Lem kind of caught himself, rubbing one Hoosier foot over the reptile worrying his ankle.

"Well," he said, after giving a good think, "these're middling big -- f'r their size...but we got lots bigger ones in Indiana."

The Racing Fox

Floyd County has been the fox hunter's Mecca for many years. Here in the neighborhood of Georgetown was the fastest fox that was ever known anywhere. The fox hunters sat around the stove of Jim Harmon's or John Baylor's general store, chewed their tobacco, spat in the box of sawdust, and bragged of how they challenged anyone from anywhere to bring his fastest dog to see really how slow it ran in comparison to this remarkable fox. Several years passed--men came, bringing their dogs from all neighboring counties and even from different parts of Kentucky, but no dog could catch the renowned fox. Often the race kept on for several days. The question was how could any animal run such a terrible race and go on without fagging for so long a time? Different opinions were formed. Some said the fox was a spirit; others said it was a super-animal. One of the strange things about the race was that now and again the fox would cross a certain place in the trail where there was a large badly bent tree with numerous branches that almost touched the ground. The fox always ran up this tree and jumped into the woods on the other side.

His fame grew, and with the bragging of the hunters--the Keithlays, Harmons, Johnsons, Cases, Shirleys and others--the race became so famous that it seemed time to investigate. Men were stationed at several points along the trail to look on, and one was set to watch at the leaning tree. After the fox had jumped into the woods, a movement was seen among the branches, and two small bright points of light were discerned. Could there be another animal crouched high up among the limbs of the tree?

Yes, there really was; the puzzle was solved. Two foxes and not one had kept the hunters busy. One ran until it was tired and returned to the leaning tree. As it ran up the trunk, its companion jumped from the branches and the race continued, with one fox always running while the other rested.

The tale is still told around the hunters' fires at night, especially when someone happens to bring up the subject of dumb animals.

"Dumb animals!" someone is sure to snort fiercely. "Them two foxes that had sense enough to fool people from all over southern Indiana and Kentucky for years on end wuzn't so dumb!"

Old Tunnel Mills

"Back in 1840 in the State of Arkansas when I was a mere lad," said an oldtimer, owner of Tunnel Mills outside of Old Vernon, who was born and bred in the hills of Jennings County and had never been out of the State, "I was the best fisherman for miles and miles around. Back in those days we really gigged. I had made for myself, out of an old hickory limb, a gig 8 foot long. Now in the next county there was a bottomless pit and in the bottomless pit was a whale, for we had seen it swimming around many a time. There was a drought and the streams were all dried up except the bottomless pit; and with the water so low somebody measured the pit and found it was only 30 foot deep. It was a rare chance to get the big fish, and several of the boys walked miles and miles to come and tell me about it. I told them I could get it, so they said I should take my 8-foot gig and go over. We all went over and paddled in a

canoe to the mouth of the pit."

At this point the oldtimer always stopped and waited for someone to ask what happened next. He would reply, "Well, boys, it was just like this. I leaned over the side of the boat and gipped the fish." "Well," the question would be asked, "did you get it?" "No, boys," would be the reply, "that fish got away, but I speared him so close to the bottom that there was enough meat left on that gig to last my family for the next two weeks."

Old Rip Snorter

Old Rip Snorter was the biggest yellow "peearch" that had lived in the Wabash for a good many years. He had lived so long that his teeth had all fallen out, and he had gotten as gaunt and peaked as a grass-fed carp. It was a sad case, and it seemed as though the days of Old Rip were numbered.

One day Mrs. Browne was talking with a neighbor on the river bridge. Mrs. Browne was the proud possessor of a set of teeth which were like the lady villain's in the old-fashioned story—beautiful but false.

The brisk breeze blowing over the river struck square between the shoulder blades of Mrs. Browne and made a ticklish sensation to stir in her nose.

"Ker-Bizz!" she sneezed, and those lovely teeth sailed out into the air, and dropped into the water with a mellow plunk.

Whenever Old Rip Snorter was seen after that, folks were surprised to see him so fat and flourishing. And just to add insult to injury, one day while Mrs. Browne was taking a boat ride, she saw Old Rip Snorter rise to the surface and grin at her, sassy as you please. And right then she rec-

ognized in his mouth her very own teeth that she had dropped when she sneezed long long before.

Who Was Drunk?

It was on Pipe Creek that Tom Moore took rod and tackle one warm day in July and went to fish. As he had a thirsty nature and feared he would have nothing but creek water to drink, Tom took along a bottle of John Barleycorn.

He found a nice shady place along the stream to sit, baited his hook and cast his line far out into the water. He had sat there for some time before he thought of the bottle in his pocket, took it out and quenched his thirst which had suddenly become middling sharp. He put the bottle back in his pocket and in a little while fell asleep. On waking up, he found the pole had been dragged from his hand down to the water's edge where a snake was coiled, looking at the fisherman with more than ordinary interest for a snake.

Tom "sot agin," baited the hook and threw it into the water. Again his thirst took possession of him and he took another drink. He felt something nudging him in the side. As he looked down he saw the snake with mouth open and tongue extended suggestively. The fisherman poured some of the contents of the bottle into the snake's mouth, and it went scurrying off into the water. Soon it appeared with a catfish in its mouth and laid the fish down beside Tom. It nudged him again and opened its mouth and Tom gave it another drink. Again it disappeared into the stream and this time came up with a bass in its mouth. Tom kept up the game, giving it a drink and in return receiving a fish each time. He finally stopped

fishing and just watched the snake, which now approached the bank with considerable difficulty. It proceeded in this wandering fashion for some time, getting more and more off its course, when suddenly two other snakes appeared on the scene. They slipped along on either side of their boon companion, one wrapping a tail around the neck and the other around its middle, and the three snakes disappeared among the weeds at the side of the stream.

Drive On!

(The most frequently repeated tall story)

Jeff Dawson was said to be the laziest man in Fountain or any other county. His neighbors labored with him on behalf of his family, hard up because he was so lazy, but appeals were of no use. Finally the citizens told him in so many words that there was no need of a dead man walking around on top the ground and he could take his choice of getting down to work or being buried alive. He chose to be buried.

On the way to the cemetery, with Jeff in a coffin on the wagon, they met a man who inquired the reason for such unusual doings, since the "corpse" was calmly puffing a corn cob pipe. When it was explained to him, he offered to help Jeff get a start in life by giving him a bushel of corn. Jeff pondered this a moment and finally rose up to ask "Is the corn shelled?" "Why, no!" replied the Good Samaritan in astonishment. Jeff resignedly lay back again in the coffin. "Drive on, boys" said he, "drive on!"

Good Measure

In the vicinity of Coal City, Owen County, lived a man by the name of Joe Crawl, an old settler who made his home in a cabin a short distance from Coal City. One morning when he got up he saw two deer a short distance from the cabin. Taking his muzzle-loading rifle he went out within close range of the game.

The deer were standing side by side on a little hill some distance from his cabin. He took aim and fired. One of the deer dropped and the other appeared to scamper away. He went over to the one that he had killed and saw blood leading from the dead one along the trail of the one that had fled. When he followed this trail for a short distance, he found the other deer dead from the same shot.

Upon examination he found that the bullet had gone through both deer, and had left a trail where it had cut off corn stalks and a small sapling. He followed the course of the bullet for a quarter of a mile and found it had finally entered a beech tree, out of which a trickle of honey was running. So he went home and got a bucket and took half a tub of honey from the bullet hole.

The net returns on one shot, therefore, were two deer and a half a tub of honey, which Joe considered fair enough.

Some Rain!

Clem Watkins, the father of Tom, used to live in the vicinity of Indian Hill in Tippecanoe County. So this story might be credited to that locality.

Clem had heard that you could raise cucumbers

in the driest season by simply taking out the head and bottom of a whiskey barrel, setting it upright in rich soil, filling it halfway to the top with well-rotted manure, and planting the cucumber seed; every day thereafter water could be poured into this barrel to supply moisture and fertility. By this process, vines thrived exceedingly and brought forth a hundredfold.

Clem thought he would try it. He obtained the barrel at Lafayette (no hard task) and had taken out the bottom and head when a tremendous storm came up from the southwest. The rain fell in torrents and no one dared go out to get the barrel under cover.

So the barrel lay out in the yard on its side, with the bung hole up. And, believe it or not, it rained so hard through the bung hole that the flood couldn't pour out fast enough at the ends, and it burst the barrel.

Fertile Soil

John Oswald, crossing watchman at Decatur, Indiana, recalls some of the experiences of early days in Indiana.

"When our folks settled in Adams County, Indiana, they were so late getting the first field cleared that it was too late to plant corn, so my father planted pumpkins and turnips in the new ground. He sowed the turnips first and then planted pumpkin seed. As he left the field he noticed that the turnip seed was up and good-sized turnips were growing.

"Then he saw that the pumpkin vines were growing so fast that he ran for the rail fence to get out of the tangle, but they twined around his legs

and held him fast on the fence. Quick as a lick he out with his Barlow knife to cut himself loose - but he was too late - a big pumpkin had grown over his pocket and he could not get at his knife.

"Just then my grandfather came out to the field and, seeing the plight of my father, pulled up a large turnip and, swinging it by its leaves, hit the pumpkin, bursting it into bits. He then cut my father loose and they returned to the house to boast of their luck in getting such fertile land. It took just three of the turnips to fill a bushel basket, so when they sold a half bushel they had to cut one turnip in two."

Hard Man - Hardpan

This story was told by George Mitchell, a "river rat" who lived years ago in the vicinity of Black Rock. He may have heard of George Washington, and his legendary reputation for truth telling, but the information evidently made little impression upon him.

Mitchell was engaged in the job of digging a well. All early wells were dug wells, the work being started with spade, shovel, and pick, and the dirt shoveled out at the top. This continued until a depth of eight or ten feet was reached, when it became necessary to resort to a windlass to remove the dirt.

The bucket was usually made of half a barrel furnished with a bail of heavy wrought iron. This bucket was filled with dirt and then drawn up and emptied by two men at the top. It was a tedious job, and a dangerous one for the digger, should the bucket come loose.

Mitchell had dug to the depth of 20 feet or

more and had struck a hardpan, a thin stratum of gravelly rock which usually overlies gravel. The bucket, full of wet clay and gravel, weighing 200 pounds, broke loose at the top of the well. A horrified cry from the men above warned Mitchell that he was in danger. He could not dodge - the well was too narrow. So he braced his legs and bowed his back to the descending bucket. It fell right on his back and drove his feet into the hardpan up to his knees.

The Hoop Snake

From Warren County comes the account of a hoop snake, the existence of which has been held in doubt by many people. Once upon a time a team and wagon was seen going down the road at a leisurely pace. All was going well and the driver especially was in a mellow mood. Not far along the way the driver noticed a hoop snake rolling down the road towards him at considerable speed. He tried to detour from the path of the oncoming reptile, but it was no go. In spite of all the detours, the snake struck the wagon tongue and buried its poisonous fangs in the shaft. The result was amazing. The wagon tongue swelled up and when it was sawed they say it yielded 350 "foot" of lumber.

The New Harness

"D' I ever tell ye the one about the new set o' harness the feller got my father knowed onct?" began Lemuel Snodgrass at one of the opening sessions of the Liar's Bench.

"'Y gum, ye never!"

"Tell it!" came the response from the other sitters.

"Well - this feller's harness was plumb wore out so he set to work to make hisself a new set of harness out of raw buffalo hide. It were sure a beauty - broad traces an inch thick, and 3 or 4 inches wide. So one morning he set out to haul in a load of wood he'd cut the day afore. He felt middling good, and as he loaded he sang, and on his way home he warbled like a lark."

"Don't you mean he hummed like a hum-bird?" put in one of his listeners.

"Who's tellin' this story anyhow. You or me?"

"Why, you air. Go ahead. Nobody's stoppin' you."

"Well, 'like a lark', I said. And it had been purty dry hereabouts for quite a spell, so this feller, he'd been prayin' for rain. When all of a sudden like, his prayers was answered. And a storm come up that started him along towards home at a right smart clip. When he reached the bottom of the steep hill, the rawhide traces had been soaked and began to stretch. So he got down and walked beside his team. But the wet traces jest kep on a-stretchin'. When he reached the top, the wagon - 'y gum! - was still down t' the bottom. By then he were plum disgusted. So he stripped the harness from the horses, hung it over a stump, and went home."

"Humph - n'en what happened?" urged one of the sitters.

"Why the sun come out and the harness begun to dry, and the traces begun to shrink."

A pause here while Lem took a good draw on his corncob pipe. "So the next time he looked out, the wagon was up to the top of the hill!"

"Wet rawhide's the stretchinist stuff!" he wound up, looking wise.

Thomas Pucket and His Bear Story

Thomas Pucket, "the man what fit the Injuns and druv the bear," became a good and loyal native of Vigo County in the year 1816. Any old citizen or the descendant of any of the early settlers will tell you there is no mistake about it.

Pucket was hunting bear one day about 20 miles south of Terre Haute. He had been hunting cows the day before when a bear had come along. Having no gun, he left the bear until he could go to the house for his rifle. But the bear did not stay put and moved on. Pucket took up his trail. He finally came across a bear lying on the sunny side of a hill, sleeping. He got close enough to examine it and was amazed at its size. He reflected that if he killed it where it lay, he could not get it home, and it was doubtful if he could even carry the hide. But since he was a man of quick conclusions and trusted his own judgment, he approached the sleeping monster and woke him up with some general observation about the weather. The bear raised his head, gaped widely, winked at Tom with his off eye, licked out his tongue in a friendly way, and lay down for another snooze.

Pucket now spoke in a deep, stern, bass voice and ordered bruin to arise and start for town, and backed this language by a punch with the muzzle of his gun. The bear was soon on his feet, but was perverse or else didn't know the way to Terre Haute, and started off waddling toward Vincennes. Pucket headed him off and made him reverse ends, but there was much zigzadding on the way.

although the general direction was about right. These by plays of the animal made him travel nearer 40 miles than the 20 he could have made it in if he had gone as the crow files. The result was that, within seven or eight miles of town, the bear lay down for a rest; and neither moral nor any other persuasion could make him budge. Tom then shot and skinned him, and the immense hide was shown to nearly everyone in Vigo County to prove the story.